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ABSTRACT

This study examined the profile of community college dropouts, in an attempt to identify how this cohort differs from university-level dropouts and to identify reasons for community college students' withdrawal from school. The authors argue that the profile of a typical community college student--a person who has a full- or part-time job, lives off-campus, and is taking classes on a part-time basis--makes retention a particular challenge for the community college student. The population of this study was defined as those who dropped out of one of 3 community colleges in the San Diego Community College District (SDCCD) (California) during fall 2000 semester, and those who did not return for the following spring 2001 semester. Three types of students were defined based on withdrawing time frames: (1) students who filed an application for the fall 2000 semester, but did not enroll in any classes (n=5,459); (2) students who withdrew from all classes during the fall 2000 semester (n=7,481); and (3) students who did not persist in the following spring 2001 semester (n=10,968). Information was collected from student records and a survey questionnaire was sent to random samples of students to assess their reasons for leaving. Reasons for leaving included class and work schedule conflicts, financial difficulties, lack of financial aid, and lack of parking in urban areas. (Contains 9 tables and 16 references.) (Author/NB)

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Community College Student Retention: Student Characteristics and Withdrawal Reasons

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Introduction

The student withdrawal from colleges in United States has long been recognized as a significant social, economic, and educational problem (Umoh, Eddy, Saulding, 1994). Therefore, improving student retention has become and continues to be, a crucial challenge for higher education. It is a challenge sparked by the increased number of students leaving colleges or universities prior to degree completion and the decreased number of college going student population in the United States. Despite efforts of tackling attrition issues by various college and university programs, only 46.7% of students in four-year public universities and 38.7% in two-year institutions will graduate (Tinto, 1993).

The results of many studies suggest that retention is a complex issue that seldom has a single cause but involves the interaction of different variables (Astin, 1975; Cope & Hannah, 1975; Lenning, Beal, & Sauer, 1980; Tinto, 1975, 1987, as cited in Umoh et al., 1994). Recognized variables related to student retention include various student characteristics and student-institutional interaction, academic aptitude and performance, level of aspiration and motivation, institutional type, image, student services offered, and

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student involvement-plus the development of a sense of belonging or degree of fit that results from student and institution interactions (Beal & Noel, 1980; Lenning, Beal, & Sauer, 1980). Furthermore, retention, student satisfaction, and student success appear to improve when retention efforts are geared toward integrating the student's total educational experience (Umoh et al, 1994).

Researchers also believe that variables related to educational goals may influence student retention. For example, Kinnick and Kempner (1988) found a significant association between student retention and the following variables: high school GPA, socioeconomic background, parental income, type of college first attended (two- or four-year), educational aspiration, and high school preparatory programs. Those more likely to complete a bachelor's degree were those with a higher high school GPA, higher socioeconomic status, initially attended a four-year institution, higher degree aspirations, and completed a college preparatory program in high school (Kinnick & Kempner, 1988).

The campus environment can also affect students' decisions to stay in or drop out of school, particularly developmental education students. Studies indicate that developmental education students who withdraw from college often rate the presence of a hostile racial climate as an important reason for their withdrawal (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Observers report that faculty, especially in senior colleges and research institutions, often have negative attitudes toward remedial students and are poorly prepared to teach them (Gross, 1981). Increasing the presence of representative group faculty members on campus has been recommended as a fundamental step toward improving campus environments. As early as the 1970s, the shortage of African-American and Hispanic instructors at two-year colleges was noted as a particular problem

(Olivas, 1979). A large body of literature is also devoted to student attrition of minority students (Ting & Bryant, 2001).

Many researchers have examined the relationship between retention and student demographic characteristics. Glass and Garrett (1995) found that retention and GPA were not related to age, gender, race, employment status, college major, or college attended. However, Tinto (1993) pointed out that older students were more likely to drop out. He explains further that typical adult students were more likely to be married, to have children at home, to live off campus, and/or to be employed while attending college. Therefore, they were more likely to encounter greater problems in finding adequate on-campus time to study in order to meet the minimum academic standards of the institution (Tinto, 1993). Furthermore, many of these students either take one or two courses at a time or leave for a semester or two and then return (stop-out). Because the average community college student is generally older than students attending four-year universities, they are more likely to fit the profile of the adult student described by Tinto (1993). However, retention research on community college students is relatively sparse or is conducted utilizing paradigms based on younger, residential four-year university students.

Several researchers have examined retention issues specific to community colleges. Voorhees's 1986 study employed a log-linear modeling approach to explore the conceptual relationships between community college student persistence and several variables, including student demographics, purpose for enrolling, intentions to return, frequency of informal interaction with faculty, and satisfaction with the institution in general. Results of this study revealed that full-time female students had greater

persistence rates than their male counterparts, while GPA, number of hours spent studying each week, and frequency of interaction with faculty, had independent effects on student persistence. Daniels (1990) also found students' academic goals and intentions to significantly affect retention. In other words, the higher the level of one's educational goals, the greater the likelihood of college completion. This was because the goal of occupational attainment became the motivating force for undertaking and completing a particular academic degree program (Tinto, 1993).

Although student retention has been investigated extensively in the past decades, the focus was primarily on four-year institutions. Only recently has retention research been conducted on the most diverse populations in two-year colleges, where attrition is the highest (Grimes & Antworth, 1996). High attrition rates for both individual and multiple community college systems, sustains interest in the options to improve community college student retention (Beatty-Guenter, 1994). Moreover, the profile of the typical community college student--a person who has a full or part-time job, lives off campus, and is taking classes on a part--time basis-makes retention a particular challenge for community colleges (Bonham & Luckie, 1993). In other words, unlike residential university students, community college students are constantly balancing the social and academic demands of the college campus with the responsibilities of family and work. Therefore, retention issues in community colleges are different from those in 4-year universities. To better understand unique community college student retention, this study is designed to identify and describe factors related to community college student retention and reasons for student's decision to withdraw. It is hoped that this research

will yield some important information that can serve as the foundation for any effort to improve student retention and success at community colleges.

Research Methods

The population of this study was defined as those who dropped out of one of three community colleges in the San Diego Community District (SDCCD) during Fall semester, 2000 and those who did not return for the following Spring semester, 2001. Three types of student withdrawals were identified based on withdrawing time frames: 1) students who filed an application for the Fall 2000 semester, but did not enroll in any classes (n = 5,459), 2) students who withdrew from all classes during the Fall 2000 semester (n = 7,481), and 3) students who did not persist in the following Spring 2001 semester (n = 10,968). Student demographic information was collected from existing student records on file. A survey questionnaire was also sent out to random samples of students to assess their reasons for leaving. The following three research questions were developed to guide this study:

1. What are the demographic differences among students who withdrew at three different time frames and to what extent do they differ from the general student population demographics?
2. What factors influenced students' decision of withdrawing and do these factors differ among students who withdraw at different time frames?
3. What factors influenced students' decision of withdrawing and do these factors differ among students who withdraw at different time frames?

Results

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the results. Results are summarized by each research question.

Research Question 1. What are the demographic differences among students who withdrew at three different time frames and to what extent do they differ from the general student population demographics?

Table 1 presents the gender, ethnicity, and age distributions of students who left SDCCD. Characteristics about the student general population were also included as a basis for comparison. As can be seen in Table 1, a slightly higher percentage of male students (50.7%) applied but did not enroll in any classes when compared to male students in the general population (48.1%). For the group of students who withdrew during the semester, the proportion of females was higher (54.1%) than the general population (51.7%). In terms of the students who did not persist in the following semester, little difference was found regarding the male and female proportion of students.

Table 1. Student Demographics by Type of Withdrawals

Demographics	General population*		Applied not enrolled*		Withdrew *		Not Persistent*	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Gender								
Female	23,502	51.7%	2,702	49.2%	4,049	54.1%	5,731	52.3%
Male	21,896	48.1%	2,786	50.7%	3,420	45.7%	5,224	47.6%
Not reported	100	0.2%	7	0.1%	12	0.2%	13	0.1%
Ethnicity								
American Indian	524	1.2%	86	1.6%	92	1.2%	121	1.1%
Asian	4,945	10.9%	419	7.6%	742	9.9%	1,111	10.1%
African American	4,470	9.8%	821	14.9%	846	11.3%	1,012	9.2%
White	2,0012	44.0%	2,194	39.9%	3,340	44.6%	4,963	45.2%
Hispanic	7,814	17.2%	1,084	19.7%	1,248	16.7%	1,832	16.7%
Filipino	2,830	6.2%	251	4.6%	443	5.9%	683	6.2%
Pac Islander	431	0.9%	60	1.1%	73	1.0%	94	0.9%
Other	1,976	4.3%	358	6.5%	313	4.2%	483	4.4%
Not reported	2,496	5.5%	222	4.0%	384	5.1%	669	6.1%
Age								
17 or under	2,234	4.9%	290	5.3%	96	1.3%	634	5.8%
18 – 24	21,030	46.6%	2,838	51.6%	3,040	40.7%	4,961	45.3%
25 – 34	12,120	26.6%	1,324	24.0%	2,490	33.3%	2,954	27.0%
35 or over	10,114	22.2%	1,043	19.0%	1,855	24.8%	2,419	22.1%
Total	45,498	100%	5495	100%	7,481	100%	10,968	100%

**General population* - *total student population.*
Applied not enrolled - *students who filed an application but did not enroll in any classes.*
Withdrew - *students who withdrew from all classes during a semester.*
Not persistent - *students who did not return in the following semester.*

With regard to ethnicity, it should be noted that of the students who applied but did not enroll, there was a higher proportion of African American (14.9%) and Hispanic (19.7%) students as compared to the proportions of the total student population; 9.8% for African American students and 17.2% for Hispanic students respectively. The distribution of students who did not persist from term to term was similar to the general population in terms of ethnicity.

Finally, when compared to the general population, the students who applied but did not enroll had a higher proportion of students between the ages of 18 and 24 (51.6% vs 46.6). Thus, students who applied but didn't enroll tended to be younger than the general population. However, for the students who withdrew during the semester, they tended to

be older since there was a higher proportion between the ages of 25-34 (33.3% vs 26.6%).

Table 2. High School GPA by Type of Withdrawals

High School GAP	General population*		Applied not enrolled*		Withdrew *		Not Persistent*	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
0.0-1.5	70	0.2%	12	0.2%	17	0.2%	16	0.1%
1.6-1.9	332	0.7%	58	1.1%	63	0.8%	74	0.7%
2.0-2.5	5,079	11.2%	744	13.5%	935	12.5%	1,053	9.6%
2.6-2.9	10,297	22.6%	1,280	23.3%	1,689	22.6%	2,242	20.4%
3.0-3.5	10,219	22.5%	1069	19.5%	1,539	20.6%	2,657	24.2%
> 3.5	6,670	14.7%	539	9.8%	842	11.3%	2,004	18.3%
Not reported	12,831	28.2%	1793	32.6%	2,396	32.0%	2,922	26.6%
Total	45,498	100%	5495	100%	7,481	100%	10,968	100%

*General population - total student population.
Applied not enrolled - students who filed an application but did not enroll in any classes.
Withdrew - students who withdrew from all classes during a semester.
Not persistent - students who did not return in the following semester.

Self reported high school GPA information is summarized in Table 2. The data in Table 2 shows a slightly higher percentage of students with a high school GPA between 2.0-2.5 for students who filed an application but not enroll in classes (13.5% vs. 11.2% in the population). However, the non persistent students had a higher proportion with high school GPA's over 3.0 than the general population (42.5% vs 37.2%). There were no differences in GPA distribution between students who withdrew during the semester and the general population.

Table 3. Educational Objective by Type of Withdrawals

Educational Objective	General Population*		Applied not enrolled*		Withdrew*		Not persistent*	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Transfer	20,858	45.9%	2,181	39.7%	3,300	44.1%	4,672	42.6%
Obtain AA/AS/Certificate – No Transfer	3,015	6.7%	474	8.6%	492	6.6%	656	6.0%
Career Related	8,141	17.9%	1,074	19.5%	1,422	19.0%	2,222	20.2%
Other	3,188	7.0%	548	10.0%	641	8.6%	977	8.9%
Undecided	9,142	20.1%	1,116	20.3%	1,428	19.1%	2,098	19.1%
Unknown	1,154	2.5%	102	1.9%	198	2.6%	343	3.1%
Total	45,498	100.0%	5,495	100.0%	7,481	100.0%	10,968	100.0%

*_General population_ - *total student population.*
Applied not enrolled - *students who filed an application but did not enroll in any classes.*
Withdrew - *students who withdrew from all classes during a semester.*
Not persistent - *students who did not return in the following semester.*

Educational objective was identified to be related to student retention in previous research, therefore, this variable was also examined in this study (See Table 3). The results in Table 3 show that the educational objective for 45.9% of the general population is to transfer. This rate is similar for students who withdrew during the semester (44.1%), but lower for those who did not persist (42.6%) and even lower for those who applied but did not enroll (39.7%).

Table 4. Annual Family Income by Type of Withdrawals

Annual Income	General Population*		Applied not enrolled*		Withdrew*		Not persistent*	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
$0-3,000	1,137	2.5%	203	3.7%	215	2.9%	240	2.2%
$3,000-5,999	683	1.5%	82	1.5%	145	1.9%	100	0.9%
$6,000-9,900	2,000	4.4%	237	4.3%	390	5.2%	364	3.3%
$9,901-14,999	4,076	9.0%	594	10.8%	738	9.9%	823	7.5%
$15,000-20,999	4,370	9.6%	606	11.0%	830	11.1%	1,047	9.5%
$21,000-26,999	2,821	6.2%	355	6.5%	506	6.8%	666	6.1%
$27,000-32,999	2,691	5.9%	343	6.2%	492	6.6%	712	6.5%
$33,000 or over	10,417	22.9%	1,035	18.8%	1,548	20.7%	2,633	24.0%
Unknown	17,303	38.0%	2,040	37.1%	2,617	35.0%	4,383	40.0%
Total	45,498	100.0%	5,495	100.0%	7,481	100.0%	10,968	100.0%

*_General population_ - *total student population.*
Applied not enrolled - *students who filed an application but did not enroll in any classes.*
Withdrew - *students who withdrew from all classes during a semester.*
Not persistent - *students who did not return in the following semester.*

Table 4 reports family income and the differences between withdrawal types. Of the students who filed an application but did not enroll in any classes, 21.8% of students' annual family income ranged from $9,901 to $20,999 when compared to the general population (18.6%). A slightly higher proportion of students in the withdrew group tended to have a family income between $15,000-20,999 annually (11.1% vs. 9.6% in the population). Finally, a higher proportion of students (24.0%) in the non-persistent group tended to make $33,000 annually or higher in their family (22.9% in the population).

Table 5. Employment Hours by Type of Withdrawals

Working Hours/Week	General Population*		Applied not enrolled*		Withdrew*		Not persistent*	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Not working	10,654	23.4%	1,283	23.3%	1,529	20.4%	2,620	23.9%
Part-Time (1 – 39 hours/week)	20,456	45.0%	2,501	45.5%	3,287	44.0%	4,526	41.2%
Full-Time (40 hours or more/week)	13,819	30.4%	1,636	29.8%	2,551	34.1%	3,721	33.9%
Not reported	569	1.3%	75	1.4%	114	1.5%	101	0.9%
Total	45,498	100.0%	5,495	100.0%	7,481	100.0%	10,968	100.0%

*General population - total student population.
Applied not enrolled - students who filed an application but did not enroll in any classes.
Withdrew - students who withdrew from all classes during a semester.
Not persistent - students who did not return in the following semester.

One of the major characteristics of community college students is that most work part-time or full-time. Student employment information is summarized in Table 5. As expected, a majority of the general student population is working either part-time (45.0%) or full-time (30.4%). Moreover, all three types of withdrawal groups follow the same pattern. However, students who withdrew during the semester or did not persist had slightly higher proportions of students working full-time (34.1% and 33.9% respectively).

Table 6 shows enrollment status across the different types of withdrawals. Significant differences were found between withdrawal types and the general population. For example, the rate of first time students and first time transfers is 75.5% among the

students who applied but did not enroll, while the general population rate is 66.9%. However, of the students who withdrew during the semester, only 22.5% were first time students or first time transfers.

Table 6. Enrollment Status by Type of Withdrawals

Enrollment Status	General Population*		Applied not enrolled*		Withdrew*		Not persistent*	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Current High School Student	1,443	3.2%	172	3.1%	57	0.8%	376	3.4%
First-Time Student	14,906	32.8%	2,296	41.8%	723	9.7%	2,576	23.5%
First-Time Transfer Student	15,532	34.1%	1,850	33.7%	955	12.8%	4,859	44.3%
Returning Transfer Student	4,451	9.8%	380	6.9%	397	5.3%	1,239	11.3%
Returning Student	9,155	20.1%	797	14.5%	737	9.9%	1,918	17.5%
Continuing Student	7 11	0.0%	-	0.0%	4,556	60.9%	-	0.0%
Not Reported	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	56	0.7%	-	0.0%
Total	45,498	100.0%	5,495	100.0%	7,481	100.0%	10,968	100.0%

*_General population_ - *total student population.*
Applied not enrolled - *students who filed an application but did not enroll in any classes.*
Withdrew - *students who withdrew from all classes during a semester.*
Not persistent - *students who did not return in the following semester.*

Table 7 shows students' cumulative college GPA at SDCCD.. The results suggest that more students who withdrew, and did not persist tended to earn a GPA of zero. This is because that more students who left were first-time new students or first-time transfer students, therefore, this was their first semester.

Table 7. Cumulative GPA at San Diego Community College District

	General Population*		Applied not enrolled*		Withdrew*		Not persistent*	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
0	5,688	12.5%	n/a	n/a	2,566	34.3%	2,140	19.5%
0.01-1.50	3,330	7.3%	n/a	n/a	399	5.3%	854	7.8%
1.51-2.00	4,444	9.8%	n/a	n/a	597	8.0%	1,110	10.1%
2.01-2.50	5,680	12.5%	n/a	n/a	826	11.0%	996	9.1%
2.51-3.00	9,522	20.9%	n/a	n/a	1,211	16.2%	2,152	19.6%
3.01-3.50	7,403	16.3%	n/a	n/a	885	11.8%	1,512	13.8%
>3.50	9,431	20.7%	n/a	n/a	997	13.3%	2,204	20.1%
Total	45,498	100.0%	n/a	n/a	7,481	100.0%	10,968	100.0%

*_General population_ - *total student population.*
Applied not enrolled - *students who filed an application but did not enroll in any classes.*
Withdrew - *students who withdrew from all classes during a semester.*
Not persistent - *students who did not return in the following semester.*

Research Question 2: What factors influenced students' decision of withdrawing and do these factors differ among students who withdraw at different time frames?

A survey questionnaire designed to assess students' withdrawal reasons was sent out to a random sample of students from each of the three types of withdrawal groups described above. In the survey, a list of possible reasons were provided and students were asked to check their reasons for not enrolling in classes or leaving the college. Survey results are summarized in the following Table 8.

Table 8. Withdrawal Reasons by Type of Withdrawals

	Applied not enrolled*	Withdrew*	Not persistent*
Reasons for leaving (survey results)	-Financial difficulties (22.8%). -Conflict with work schedule (22.3%). -Enrolled at another school (21.8%). -Courses were not available (14.5%). -Family obligations (11.4%).	-Conflict with work schedule (31.0%). -Personal reasons (21.1%). -Parking issues (16.5%). -Family obligations (16.0%). -Financial difficulties (14.5%). -Dissatisfaction with instruction (14.3%).	-Transferred to another school (28.5%). -Conflict with work schedule (19.2%). -Course scheduling issues (10.7%). -Personal reasons (10.7%). -Completed educational goal (10.7%).

**General population* - *total student population.*
Applied not enrolled - *students who filed an application but did not enroll in any classes.*
Withdrew - *students who withdrew from all classes during a semester.*
Not persistent - *students who did not return in the following semester.*

There were some differences and similarities between the three withdrawal groups regarding their reasons for leaving SDCCD. Students who filed an application but did not enroll in classes listed financial difficulties (22.8%), conflict with work schedule (22.3%), enrolled at another school (21.8%), courses were not available (14.5%), and family obligations (11.4%) as the top reasons for their decision to leave. Conflict with work schedule (31.0%), personal reasons (21.1%), parking issues (16.5%), family obligations (16.0%), financial difficulties (14.5%), and dissatisfaction with instruction were identified as major reasons for withdrawing for students who withdrew during the semester. Non-persistent students indicated transferring to another school (28.5%), conflicts with work schedule (19.2%), course scheduling issues (10.7%), personal reasons (10.7%), and completed educational goals (10.7%) as their reasons for not returning the following semester. All groups felt that conflict with work schedule was a significant

barrier in their academic pursuits. Family obligations and other personal problems also impacted students' decisions to leave negatively.

Research Question 3: What can the college do to encourage students to enroll in classes/stay in school?

In the survey, students were also asked to provide their suggestions on how to retain more students. A list of suggestions was provided to students who applied but did not enroll and those who withdrew. Results were summarized in the following Table 9.

Table 9. What the colleges should do to retain more students.

Applied not enrolled*	Withdrew*
Offer online registration (36.8%)	Increase parking capacity (33.4%)
Offer more class sections during the evening (32.1%)	More flexible class schedule (30.9%)
Offer more short term courses (30.1%)	More online courses (18.1%)
Schedule courses on the weekends (27.5%)	More financial aid (16.7%)
More financial aid information should be available (23.8%)	More career-oriented programs (14.8%)

*_General population_ - *total student population.*
Applied not enrolled - *students who filed an application but did not enroll in any classes.*
Withdrew - *students who withdrew from all classes during a semester.*
Not persistent - *students who did not return in the following semester.*

Results suggested that students who applied but did not enroll in any classes would like to have online course registration (36.8%), more flexible class schedule (evening classes, 32.1%; short-term class, 30.1%; weekend classes, 27.5%), and financial aid information (23.8%) to encourage them to enroll in classes. For students who withdrew during the semester, increasing park capacity (33.4%), more flexible class schedule (30.9%), more online courses (18.1%), more financial aid (16.7%), and more career-oriented programs (14.8%) would have helped them to stay in school.

Conclusions and Discussion

Based on the results of the study, the following conclusions were formed:

1. When compared to the general student population:
    a. Students who apply but don't enroll tend to
        i. be male
        ii. be younger
        iii. be African American or Latino
        iv. be part or full time workers
        v. have lower high school GPA's
        vi. have lower incomes
    b. Students who withdraw during the semester tend to
        i. be female
        ii. be older
        iii. be part or full time workers
    c. Students who don't persist in the following semester tend to
        i. be younger
        ii. be part or full time workers
        iii. have higher high school GPA's
        iv. have higher incomes
2. Conflict with work schedule, enrollment at another school, personal reasons, financial difficulties, and family obligations are cited as top reasons for community college students to leave higher education.

3. To retain more students, the community colleges should offer more flexible classes schedule and more financial aid. It is also noted that parking capacity could be a big issue that influenced student retention in big cities.

The purpose of this study was to identify and describe factors related to community college student retention and reasons for students' decision to withdraw. Based on the time frame in which students withdrew from SDCCD, three types of withdrawals were identified: (1) students who applied for the Fall 2000 semester but did not enroll, (2) students who withdrew during the Fall 2000 semester, and (3) students who did not persist to the following Spring 2001 semester. In addition, two research questions were used to guide the research.

The first research question sought to identify any demographic differences among the three withdrawal type groups relative to the general student population. Based on previous research, several demographic variables were examined. These variables included gender, ethnicity, age, high school GPA, educational objective, income, working hours, enrollment status, and cumulative college GPA. Of the three withdrawal types, students who applied but did not enroll appear to differ the most when compared to the general student population. In particular, these students tended to be more male, African American or Latino, and younger. In addition, they tended to have lower high school GPA's and income. On the other hand, students who withdrew during the semester better reflected the general population but tended to be more female and older, while the students who did not persist in the following semester tended to be younger with higher high school GPA's and higher incomes. Finally, relative to the general student

population, all three types of withdrawal groups had similar proportions of part-time and full-time working students and students stating transfer as an educational goal.

With the exception of students who withdraw during the semester, the results suggest that there are characteristics unique to students who apply but do not enroll or students who do not persist to the next semester. For example, in explaining the higher rates of younger students among those who apply but don't enroll, many graduating high school students apply on average to 3 or 4 different colleges and universities, including community colleges. Therefore, when a student applies to both a four-year university and community college, the community college is more likely to be the fallback college in case he or she doesn't get accepted into the university. Moreover, most students who are not confident of their chances of getting into a four-year university will also apply to their local community college. It is interesting to note that the students who applied but didn't enroll tended to have lower high school GPA's and income, which are typically considered academic and financial factors contributing to a student's chances of being accepted to four-year universities.

In terms of students who did not persist, the results suggest that these students have more options open to them. In other words, because they tend to be younger and have higher high school GPA's and higher incomes, they have the means to go another college or proprietary school. However, this group also had a higher proportion of full-time workers (relative to the general student population), which would suggest that they would leave for schools that provided a better selection of courses in the evening.

The second research question focused on the reasons stated by the students as to why they withdrew. A survey questionnaire was sent out to random samples of students

o assess their reasons for leaving. In considering the results, the top reasons for leaving were different among the three types of withdrawal groups. For example, many students who apply eventually do not enroll because they can't afford the enrollment fees, thus it is not surprising that financial difficulty was cited as the top reason for leaving among the students who applied but didn't enroll. The top reason cited by students who withdrew during the semester was conflict with work schedule. Again, this result seems plausible because when students initially enroll in courses, many encounter problems with not only getting the courses they want and/or need, but also getting the courses offered during the times they can attend. Therefore, scheduling becomes the number one issue for these students, particularly since most of them are either working part-time or full-time. Finally, the primary reason for leaving cited by students who did not persist was because they transferred to another school. However, transferring to another school would suggest that the student completed his or her educational goal. Thus, with the exception of these students, the next most cited reason for not persisting was conflict with work schedule, which is also the top reason indicated by students who withdrew during the semester. In fact, conflict with work schedule is a primary reason indicated by all three types of withdrawal groups when the top two reasons are considered. Furthermore, it should be noted that the top two reasons alone, make up almost half of the responses for all three groups.

In summary, the results of this study strongly support the notion that community college students are more diverse than university students, particularly in terms of age and employment status. Consequently, when community college students do decide to leave, regardless of whether they apply but don't enroll, withdraw during the semester, or

fail to persist to the next semester, it is primarily the result of the student's struggle to maintain a balance between the academic and social demands of the campus and the responsibilities of off-campus life (e.g., work and family). Furthermore, given the relative ease for students to leave and then re-apply at community colleges, their off-campus life usually wins out in this constant struggle for balance.

Recommendations

This research revealed important information for community college administrators, faculty and student service personnel related to community college student retention. These findings have implications on retention strategies which addressing community college students' needs. It is recommended that to improve retention rates of community college students, the following practices should be implemented:

1. Offer more flexible class schedule

   Results of this study revealed that conflict with work schedule is the single most important reason cited by community college students for leaving higher education. As we discussed earlier, most community college students work part-time or full-time and they have to balance work and school as well as family obligations. Therefore, it is critical that the colleges offer a variety of class schedules to meet diverse needs of the students. Short-term, evening, weekend, and online classes can all serve this purpose.

2. Make financial aid information more readily available to students

   Financial difficulty was also one of the most important factors cited by community college students as their primary reason of leaving higher education. Therefore, offering more financial aid would be an effective means to retain more

students. Community college students are also very diverse in terms of social economic status, thus, providing more financial aid would help more many disadvantaged students stay in school. It is recommended that information about financial aid possibilities should be made available to students at any time.

3. Strengthen academic counseling service

Community colleges should offer adequate student academic counseling services to all students. Counseling is the single most important student services for community college students to get information about course offering, transfer, and other resources. Counselors can help students understand what is expected of them in order to complete their college degree programs or educational goal and where to find assistance when it becomes necessary to do so. Most community colleges are operating differently than 4-year universities where there are no academic advisors for students. Hence, improving and strengthening counseling service is critical to student retention and success in community colleges.

4. Improve on campus parking

Students also vigorously commented about their frustration with on campus parking. Many of the students cited difficulty in finding an on-campus parking space as their primary reason for leaving higher education. This issue is more significant in urban colleges located at big cities, especially central cities. A majority of community college students are all commuters, hence, improving on-campus parking is critical to retain students at community colleges.

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